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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that, commenting on reports from Cairo, Deputy State Department Spokesman J. Adam Ereli, said on Wednesday: "We're not party to any reported grant initiative, nor am I aware of any plans to host a conference or some other kind of multilateral ceremony, with respect to a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian question." However, Ereli mentioned the United States' involvement in current regional developments in close cooperation with the Palestinians, with the Israelis, with the Egyptians and with others, notably on the issue of the upcoming Palestinian elections. Israel Radio quoted Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon as saying in Washington Wednesday that the convening of an international convention is a "failed idea," and that one should wait until it becomes known who will lead the PA after the elections there.

The three major dailies bannered the political situation in Israel. Ha'aretz quoted associates of PM Sharon as saying that Sharon hopes to present a new government to the Knesset within 10 days of today's meeting of the Likud Central Committee, which will decide whether the Labor Party will enter the government. Maariv quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying that he will vie for Likud chairmanship "in the post-Sharon era."

Jerusalem Post reported that Israel has called reported accusations from the U.S. Wednesday that its defense officials were engaged in industrial espionage "a misunderstanding" based on chutzpa and general nosiness on the part of the Israelis. Ha'aretz reported that the Defense Ministry delegation in New York is instructing army officers and representatives of the Israeli defense industries currently in the U.S. regarding working procedures in the U.S. This activity, which is led by Defense Ministry D-G Amos Yaron, is a consequence of the allegations against Israel.

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian delegates at the international conference of donors in Oslo as saying Wednesday that the Palestinians are interested in resuming talks with Israel as soon as possible.

Leading media (banner in Hatzofe) quoted Disengagement Administration Director Yonatan Bassi as saying Wednesday that settlers slated for evacuation will be compensated in a series of low payments. Ha'aretz and other media reported that a number of Likud Knesset members who are opposed to Sharon's disengagement plan are pushing for an increase in state compensation for settlers to be evacuated under the pullout.

Maariv reported that last May President Moshe Katsav contacted Syrian President Bashar Assad, offering to meet with him. The newspaper reported that Assad accepted the suggestion, on condition Katsav represent the government. The media cited contradictory responses by various Katsav associates.

Leading media reported that talks took place in Brussels Wednesday between NATO and ministers from Israel and six Arab countries. At the meeting, which dealt with terror, Israel was represented by Diaspora and Jerusalem Affairs Minister Natan Sharansky.

Ha'aretz quoted NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop as saying the alliance would agree to send peacekeepers to the Middle East only after an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty is signed.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday Sharon responded to allegations of immoral conduct within the IDF. He told reporters: "IDF soldiers are the most moral in the world." Jerusalem Post quoted supporters of Mustafa Barghouti, a candidate in the January 9 Palestinian elections, as saying that he was beaten by soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint late Wednesday. Yediot reported that Foreign Ministry D-G Ron Prosor is coordinating PR efforts to improve the attitude of IDF soldiers towards the Palestinian population and members of international bodies seeking to cross roadblocks. The newspaper reported that, among other actions, the Foreign Ministry will brief officers serving at roadblocks, and present to them examples from the international media coverage about how unnecessary incidents in the territories harm Israel.

Leading media cited figures released Wednesday by the IDF: at least 29 innocent Palestinians -- out of 148 civilians -- have been killed during the course of the year; the IDF has killed 119 terrorists in the West Bank this year.

Ha'aretz cited two new separate studies -- a joint research by a Hebrew University scholar and a Bethlehem University academic, and another one by a Hebrew University researcher -- that found that Israel's educational system is hardly better than the Palestinian one when it comes to inserting political messages in textbooks.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported that next week at the Herzliya Conference Dr. Uzi Arad and two other strategic experts will propose a three-way solution to the Golan issue: Israel would evacuate about half of the Golan but retain its western part; in exchange, Jordan would transfer to Syria an area bordering the two countries, and receive a similar area of land from Israel in the Arava region.

Leading media reported that the outgoing spokesman of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, Israel Tikochinsky, appeared on Egyptian TV this week for the first time. He was quoted as saying: "PM Sharon is serious in his intention... There is a golden opportunity for the Palestinians to prove that they are capable of acting responsibly."

Ha'aretz quoted sources in the office of Hani al-Hassan, a member of Fatah's council who oversees the Fatah offices in the territories, as saying Wednesday that jailed Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti is expected to announce "in the next 24 hours" that he will withdraw from the race for PA leadership if his political demands are met. In contrast, Jerusalem Post cited a denial by Ahmed Ghanem, the newly appointed head of Barghouti's election campaign, that Barghouti had decided to withdraw from the elections.

Leading media reported that Wednesday the private Israeli airline Israir filed an 8-million shekel (about USD 1.85 million) lawsuit against national carrier El Al for allegedly misusing its monopoly position on the Tel Aviv-New York route.

Yediot reported that the Foreign Ministry will launch a campaign in the CIS to warn local women against being lured into a "fun job" in Israel, telling them they could become victims of trafficking in persons.

Jerusalem Post cited a poll published Wednesday by the (Palestinian) Jerusalem Media and Communication Center: -59.3 percent of Palestinians feel optimistic regarding the future in general compared with 45.3 percent last June. -56.7 percent of Palestinians said they supported a two-state solution to the conflict compared with 44.5 last June. -51.8 percent said they were opposed to "military operations" against Israeli targets and consider them harmful to Palestinian interests, compared with 26.9 percent last June. Only 41.1 percent of the Palestinians believe that terrorist attacks should continue compared with 65.4 percent last June.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "A unity government is not generally advisable, and certainly not in a normal democracy, which needs an effective opposition as it needs air to breathe. But in the face of the anomaly of the ongoing occupation, none of this matters."

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Israel must ... stick to its original, unilateral disengagement plan, and implement it diligently, modestly and with a low profile, while holding security coordination on the ground with the Palestinians, no more."

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz: "The disengagement is a moral and ideological victory -- in the Arab media, even in the 'moderate' Arab states, the festivities are already in full swing -- by terror over the Zionists, who are being forced to uproot settlements."

Block Quotes:

I. "Mobilize For War"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 8): "In this war over the drawing of a new, reasonable, agreed-upon border for Israel, perhaps even more than in the Six-Day War when the first unity government was established, a stable emergency government is needed that will focus on the main goal and in which the political interests of its various elements will take a back seat to the shared goal of beginning to end the occupation.... Those who view the very establishment of a unity government as a serious democratic aberration should understand that there is no more serious aberration in Israel's democracy than its control over 1.5 million Palestinians to whom that democracy does not apply. The values of Israeli democracy today barely reach the checkpoints, and beyond these checkpoints, acts are done in the name of democracy about which most of the public would rather not know. A unity government is not generally advisable, and certainly not in a normal democracy, which needs an effective opposition as it needs air to breathe. But in the face of the anomaly of the ongoing occupation, none of this matters. The arguments against a unity government are valid for the moment after the withdrawal. But for the withdrawal itself, the public and its elected officials must mobilize as for a war and carry out the task with as many political forces as possible consolidated behind it."

II. "The Advantages of a Low Profile"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 8): "In the wake of Arafat's death and the changes in the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli disengagement plan is turning into a move that is no longer absolutely unilateral.... Israel's enemies in the Arab world can overlook a unilateral step taken by Israel, but not renewing the momentum of negotiations and recognizing Israel. Elements such as Hamas, Iran or Islamic Jihad have no interest in the disengagement plan succeeding, and negotiations with the PA will only spur them to throw a wrench in the works to make it fail. This is the paradox that Israel should have already learned to recognize from its past failed attempts: the 'much' is the enemy of the realistic 'little.' Disengagement is a little, but it could develop into a lot, and relieve the Palestinian demographic density and lead to stability. Anyone aspiring to much more than this is liable to lose even this little bit (the Americans in Iraq for example). Israel has already understood this paradox in regard to Abu Mazen: leaving him alone for the next few months is the best help that Israel can give him..... Israel must therefore stick to its original, unilateral disengagement plan, and implement it diligently, modestly and with a low profile, while holding security coordination on the ground with the Palestinians, no more. We must explain to our friends in the world that this disengagement will of itself create an opportunity for future negotiations, not the reverse. The partying, the international conferences, the expectations and the symbols, if there is any need for them, can wait."

III. "Anti-National Unity"

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz (December

8): "Those who warned against the Oslo disaster, and were right by any measure of the results, are now saying that the uprooting of settlements will lead to disaster. This of course refers to the internal national-Zionist schism, but also -- and for this the Labor Party was sent packing -- to national security. The disengagement is a moral and ideological victory -- in the Arab media, even in the 'moderate' Arab states, the festivities are already in full swing -- by terror over the Zionists, who are being forced to uproot settlements. The expected result, even if the Arabs offer a cease-fire for reorganizing, re-equipping and recharging their energies, is the continuation of the war of terror -- perhaps with even greater vigor. The uprooting proves after all that when the Jews are badgered they capitulate, and if the badgering continues, they will continue to capitulate. And the sea, if Allah wills it, is the limit."

KURTZER